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Personality variables in decision - making

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Abstract

Decision-making is one of the elementary competences of any person who holds a managerial position. The paper aims at identifying the frequency of decision-making styles of school managers and the implications of the non-cognitive factors in making their decisions. Without using up the list of possible catalysts of the decision-making, the research took into account dependent variables like the locus of control and leadership style. The results obtained emphasized the importance of the leadership style and of locus of control in decision-making.

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1. Theoretical framework

Decision-making is one of elementary abilities of any person who holds a managerial position. The success or the failure of the managerial activity as well as the manager's performances depend on the quality of the taken decisions to a large extent and, consequently, they are analyzed in relation to the manager's capacity to arrive at efficient decisions. It is considered that a decisional process is rational if, by using a logical analysis of relevant knowledge, it leads to the selection of the best decision.

To arrive at a decision means to choose from a plurality of solutions or variants of action, based on preset standards and parameters, with specialized instruments, the one which has the biggest opportunities of success with a view to attain the goals of a certain group. (Nicolescu, 1998) The decision constitutes the strength of management, its most active and dynamic form through which it exercises its functions plenarily. It has direct effects over the decisions and actions of at least another person.

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Although they have similar tasks and objectives, there are big differences in the manner decisions are made by the managers from different organizations or even from the same organization. The differences can be explained by personality traits, professional experience and by the managerial style (leadership) which confer the managers a certain decisional style.

Analyzing the impact of the personality traits over professional performances, it has been determined that certain traits can predict performance in a large number of professions, such as: impulse (calm, self-assertive and moderate persons, relaxed towards anxious, hostile and neurotic individuals); extraversion (assertive, dominant, energetic, active, enthusiastic, intrepid people); the opening towards experience (intellectual curiosity, innovative, imaginative, nontraditional spirit); agreeableness and altruistic spirit (the preference for interpersonal relations; scrupulosity. (Zhao & Seibert, 2006).

The style, defined initially by Allport as a distinctive or characteristic behaviour, a particular way of acting, enriched its significance being considered in management, a pattern or a preferred way of doing something, which remains virtually the same over a long period of time (Allport, 1991).

At the beginning of the sixties, the leadership is defined in a behaviourist manner, as a multitude of characteristics of the manager's behaviour whereas the type of leadership being defined as a basic unit (constituted of or given from/by the total of qualities, knowledge and aptitudes). Gelinier (1968) compares the type and the leadership style to an iceberg, in which the visible part (that is a third of the iceberg) represents the leadership style and the invisible part (two thirds of the iceberg), the type of leadership (Zlate, 2004). The types of behaviour specific to the manager belong to a man and it is hard, if not impossible to conceive that the personality traits of the respective man, positive or negative, do not influence these behaviours. The leadership style imply temperament traits which can bring advantages or disadvantages to it, according to educational influences, as well as some aptitudes which are formed or acquired during lifespan.

From a psycho-social perspective, „the leadership style is the concrete manner of playing a role, therefore the effective transposition of the exigencies derived from the managerial status on the behavioural level”, (Zlate, 2004, p.97) „is the manner in which the functions of leadership are achieved, the typical modality of the manager's behaviour towards the members of the group” (Sintion & Paparia, 2000, p.45)

The leadership style does not act individually or independently, but correlated with other variables, which makes its effects to be pregnant and full of significance upon the diverse compartments of the organization and especially on their activities. Among the variables which contribute to the delimitation of the leadership styles one can find the „the manner of decision-taking. (Nicolescu & Verboncu, 2001).

The manner of solving a decisional problem differs from one individual to another according to his cognitive style and preferences in point of specific modalities of mental acquisition and processing of information. The researches in cognitive psychology demonstrated the fact that people use different thinking styles when they face the solving of decisional problems.

Thus, in their researches, McKenney & Keen (1974), have reached the conclusion that there are two fundamental styles in approaching decisional problems in organizations: systematic and intuitive.

The systematic managers structure the approached problem into different components, analyze each component, then they recompose the problem and use different complex analysis techniques. „They have the tendency to search for a proper method, to draw a step-by-step planning, to be very consciously directed in approaching the problem, to justify the quality of the solution through the method adopted, to define the restrictions of the problem since the beginning of the process, to engage in a advanced refining of the analysis, to achieve a controlled search of additional information and to carry out any separate analysis they begin”. (McKenney & Keen, 1974, p. 79 - 90).

The intuitive ones manipulate simultaneously a multitude of variables and the solutions and observations come to them without a logical enterprise, being very efficient in solving very complex problems, since they are capable to grasp the overall situation better than judicious thinkers. They tend to keep in mind the whole problem, to redefine the problem frequently as they advance in its solving, to rely on suppositions and even on intuitions in finding a solution and to take into consideration many options simultaneously (McKenney & Keen, 1974, p.79-90).

2. Design of Research

2.1. Objective

The main objective of the paper is to identify the frequency of decision-making styles of school managers from preschool and school (primary, middle and high school) units and the implications of non-cognitive factors in their decision-making. At the same time, the study also explores the relation between the leadership style and the decisional style. Without using up the list of possible catalysts of the decision-making style, the research took into account dependent variables (non-cognitive factors) like the locus of control and the leadership styles.

2.2. Participants

A number of 34 school managers participated in the study, 12 males (35%) and 22 females (65%) aged between 24 and 58 years ($M = 44,5$; standard deviation of 4,77), with a professional experience between 6 and 36 years ($M = 17,4$; standard deviation of 3,82), 18 from urban environment (52,6%) and 16 from the rural environment (47,4%) . All subjects have academic studies, 12 subjects (38%) are managers in preschool units (kindergartens with long day care service), 12 (38%) are managers in middle schools, grades I – VIII, and 10 (24%) are managers of high school units.

There were no strict selection criteria of subjects, the main selection criterion being the hold of a managerial position and a relevant experience in the field.

2.3. Measures

In order to collect the necessary information for the research, we have used the following methodology: General Decision-Making Style Questionnaire, Rotter's Locus of Control Scale and Decision-Making Styles Questionnaire.

The identification of the leadership style had been carried out by means of an evaluation questionnaire made up of 35 questions with five answering variants: always, often, occasionally, rarely, never. The leadership style is appreciated following the classical model which determines two distinct directions: task-oriented (autocratic style) and people oriented (democratic/participative style).

In order to measure the dimension internality – externality, Locus of Control Questionnaire elaborated by Rotter, adapted and standardized in Romania by S. Chelcea had been used. The questionnaire consists of 40 items with two forced-choice scale Yes/No. The scores obtained can vary between 0 and 40 points. The lower the score, the less belief in the internal control and the higher the score, the most powerful faith in the external control of a person (Chelcea, S., 2007).

The decision-making styles – rational, dependant, avoidant, intuitive, spontaneous – had been evaluated through a questionnaire made up of 20 items, with the dominant style given by the biggest score.

2.4. Procedure

The tests had been applied individually within the school units of the subjects' working place. No time limit had been demanded. Each subject was given instructions in advance to fill the questionnaire.

The quotation of the evaluation questionnaire results had been made through round numbers from 1 to 5 in case of direct quoting and starting from 5 for the items marked for inverse quotation(IQ). By adding the obtained scores, the subject had been listed in the autocratic or democratic/participative style.

The dimension internality – externality settled through the Locus of control questionnaire had been determined by adding the scores obtained by the subjects. The lower the score the most powerful the belief in internal control – internalists and the higher the score, the most powerful the person's belief in external control - externalists. The mean value and the standard deviation had been calculated.

In appreciating the decisional style we had taken into consideration that the rational style uses a logical and organized approach in decision-taking, the dependant style is based prevalingly on the advice, support and guidance

from others in decision-taking, the avoidant style avoids and/or procrastinates decision-taking, the intuitive style is centered on intuitions and impressions in decision-taking and the spontaneous style takes decision on the spur of the moment, rapidly and without too many deliberations.

In order to demonstrate that there are significant differences as regards the leadership style, the locus of control and the decisional style among the managers from the preschool and school units, we had appealed to the test „t” for independent samples.

The calculus of correlations (Pearson correlation coefficient) among the values of the scales of Locus of control, the Identification of the Leadership Questionnaire and the Decisional Style Questionnaire, allowed us to demonstrate the proposed objectives.

3. Results and discussions

The analysis of the data had been carried out through their reference to the content of the instruments used, the leadership style, the decisional style and the locus of control, to the subjects' gender, to the didactic experience as well as to the type of the school unit and in accordance with the objective of the paper, we had achieved the correlation analysis of the variables.

In case of evaluating the leadership style, the data processing showed significant differences between the scale scores and in case of global scores. The differences showed on the two dimensions „task-oriented” și „people-oriented” are significant at a threshold of 0,05 ($p=0,23$, respectively $p=0,25$), and the calculated values of U (64500 and 72500 > tabular value $U=55$) support this affirmation. Whereas school managers from the preschool educational system, only females, have a people –oriented leadership style, school managers from the high school units, both males and females, adopt a task-oriented leadership style, autocratic to the utmost extent (only 16% of them consider they have a democratic leadership style).

Concerning the analysis of the scores obtained at Locus of control evaluation scale, an average value had been obtained at the level of the whole sample $M = 13,25$, $\sigma = 4,56$ which situates our sample, according to the reference standard elaborated by S. Chelcea (Chelcea, S, 2007, p. 375) on the Romanian population, in the category of „ambivalent”, characterized by the combination between both the internal and external control beliefs. The average of the scores obtained by the managers of the preschool educational units of our sample ($M=14,52$, $\sigma = 2,63$) places them in the „ambivalent”, category as well but much closer to the inferior limit of the average score of the „externalists”, unlike the average score of the managers from high school educational units ($M= 12,52$, $\sigma = 3,58$) which is placed towards the inferior limit of the „ambivalent”, category, closer to the „internalists”. The analysis of the scores obtained according to the variable didactic experience places the average score ($M=12,03$, $\sigma = 3,61$) of the subjects with considerable didactic experience (over 25 years) in the inferior category of „ambivalent”, while the average score of the subjects with little professional experience (under 10 years) is close to the inferior limit of the externalists ($M = 15,23$, $\sigma = 2,52$).

Concerning the variable gender, no significant differences in the average score of locus of control scores had been obtained in any group of school managers.

The analysis in the options of the two variables (females-males) for certain categories of items reveals that male managers have a high internal locus of control for the items related to academic achievement and promotions while female managers consider that they can control the activities through their efforts. Males consider that it is enough to be intelligent and have the control over promotions (68,4% of them answered affirmatively at this item) unlike females (12,6%) who consider promotions as being the result of external factors („it is a matter of luck”).

As regards the decisional style the distribution of the school managers is the following: 43% rational decisional style, 18% dependant, 3% avoidant, 29% intuitive, 7% spontaneous. Male school managers have a predominantly rational decisional style as compared to female school managers who have an intuitive decisional style to a large extent. We can observe differences between the high school managers who have a rational decisional style in a percentage of 82% as compared to preschool managers who have only in a percentage of 2% rational decisional style and to a large extent a dependant decisional style.

Concerning the analysis of the decisional style of the two categories of school managers, the data obtained show that there are small differences on different evaluated dimensions. Test T calculated for each scale of the questionnaire show that there are differences in the decisional style of the preschool managers for the dimension

rational decisional style and intuitive decisional style ($t=0,06$, $p\leq 0,05$), as well as between the rational decisional style and the dependant one ($t=0,04$, $p\leq 0,05$).

With a view to verify the hypothesis, we calculated the correlations among the scale values of Locus of control, Identification of the Leadership style Questionnaire and Identification of the Decisional style Questionnaire. The Pearson correlation coefficient has values ranging between 0,20 and 0,322. Significantly positive correlations had been obtained at the significance threshold of 0,05 between the leadership style and the dimension extraversion. Significantly positive correlations had been obtained at the significance threshold 0,01 at the scales extraversion and rational decisional style ($r=0,499$). The persons who correspond to these personality types act and involve in the specific group problems without having the feeling that they apply further efforts.

4. Conclusions

The study demonstrated that cognitive factors and a series of noncognitive ones – extraversion/introversion, the leadership style, professional experience, the specific of the school units, etc., imply in school managers' decision-making. Following the statistic analysis, it had been observed that there are significant correlations among the decisional style, the leadership style and the dimension extraversion/introversion of school managers. We consider that locus of control as a personality variable, is not the single factor which determines performance in decision-making.

The people-oriented leadership style, dominant in the behaviour of preschool managers, can be explained through the fact that they are females and there is a distinctiveness of these activities. As the research developed, we have observed that the variable downward communication style should be analyzed, too.

The research is somehow limited through the small number of subjects and through the lack in the appreciation of the managers' performances in their activities at the workplace.

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